

How to raise awareness with unconventional tools (theatre, porteur de parole)

Summary of the project/activity

The SEACS project aims to test and experiment new ways to engage and raise people's awareness regarding saving energy.

The Conseil Général des Côtes d'Armor and Lannion-Trégor Communauté chose to try out non-conventional tools to raise awareness and target people that do not really feel affected by the issue of climate and energy. Indeed, it is noticeable that during conferences, information meetings, fairs, etc., the same people tend to attend; people who are already informed and involved. Therefore, the challenge was to: "attract a non-captive audience". Two approaches were trialled: the "Porteur de Parole" technique which is designed to interact with people in public spaces; forum theatre, which gets a person involved in an issue through a theatrical game; it is usually comical and off the wall theatre that makes it possible to question the audience, who have come for amusement, not to learn something.

Project objectives

- To attract a non-captive audience so as to communicate a message
- To raise awareness of the issues surrounding energy
- To show other organisations that there are ways of raising awareness other than guides, flyers and more information meetings, etc.

Methodology/approach

The "Porteur de Parole" is an event conducted in a public space and:

- involves passers-by by means of a question displayed on a notice board .
- creates discussions and thus enables people who sometimes are not listened to in other circumstances to express themselves
- gathers the words of passers-by

A question is written in large print on boards and then displayed in a visible location. This question invites people to react concerning a specific subject area, such as saving energy. Their opinions are then written (by a scribe) on panels in the public space.



This technique can be described as the opposite of a traditional information stand that provides documents but that is not very well suited to listening to people and entering into discussions with them. With the "word boards", people are not dealing with an organisation with which they may not necessarily want to interact with or enter into discussion.

Training was organised for the Climate and Energy Ambassadors and other personnel from the Lannion-Trégor Communauté in April 2013 on how to run a "Porteur de Parole" event. It was provided by the organisation behind the idea. After the training, the tool was trialled at several events organised at the Lannion town market between April and June 2013. The question, "How do you go about saving?" was asked on 4 "word boards", and the issue of mobility ("In your opinion, what does cycling in Trégor mean?", "And what if you had to live without a car?") was covered twice, in particular during Mobility Week in September 2013.

Forum theatre is a tool focussing on collective thinking and finding solutions to a given problem. The Lannion-Trégor Communauté has used it in two instances: householders' meeting followed by the Energy Coach initiative and during meetings with tenants of new social housing. The aim was to use forum theatre to raise awareness of the behavioural changes needed to save energy. The aim was also to enable new neighbours to get to know each other and to create a sense of solidarity in the neighbourhood.

The troupe chose to use the "Étincelle" forum theatre method, in which sketches are acted out by actors from within the troupe instead of participants. These "Étincelles" allow participants to discover forum theatre and to become aware of eco-friendly actions at the same time.



The troupe acted out four sketches of conflict situations relating to saving energy (an energy bill that is too high, car-sharing between neighbours, a youth cooking without using a saucepan lid and a lawn mower loan between neighbours). Participants were invited to choose one or two sketches. The chosen sketch was acted out once more and participants were able to stop it at any time to suggest and act out an alternative aimed at saving energy while resolving the conflict. The group worked together to create a bespoke solution and its practical implementation by testing out the proposed solution on stage. At the end of the evening, each person (both actors and participants) was invited to make a commitment to one or more changes aimed at saving energy.

This method can also be used in people's homes – for example, a play was acted out in a social housing apartment; nobody had to travel to an unknown location. Meetings between the actor/director and professionals or "experts" from the energy sector provided an opportunity to define the messages to be conveyed. The theatre professional then created a show based around these messages. Invitations to the show were given out by the social housing landlord to inform tenants of the performances. The show, made it possible to create an intimate atmosphere of trust.

The tools used

Specifically, conducting the "Porteur de Parole" event requires preparatory work on:

- setting up in the public space: a busy location, careful installation of the statement panels and of the scribe so as to catch the eye, but not restrict pavements, etc.
- the choice of the question, which must lead to a statement based on personal experience: no closed-ended questions or questions that are too general.

For the "Forum Theatre", no specific tools, props or other items may be used.

How was the project managed?

The steering committee for the Forum Theatre consisted of the SEACS Climate and Energy Ambassador, social housing landlords, people working on actions to support tenants and the actor/director. The latter also brought a young student from a secondary school participating in the

SEACS project to be an actor.

How much did the project cost and how was it financed?

For the Conseil Général, the project was half financed by the ERDF and half financed by the Conseil Général des Côtes d'Armor. The creation of the show and five performances cost €4,800. It should be pointed out that the show is subsequently being used by the troupe with other organisations.

The Lannion-Trégor Communauté action received financing from the SEACS project (50%: ERDF and 20%: Conseil Général des Côtes d'Armor). The "Porteur de Parole" event (training and trialling events) cost €2,500; the forum theatre service costs between €1,500 and €2,000 per meeting.

What have we learned from this project?

The "Porteur de Parole" action led to numerous discussions with passers by, either at the stand or walking around the market. The people who got involved and among whom awareness was raised were of a different profile to those encountered during the usual council activities and conferences. Therefore, the word boards are a good tool for providing information and raising awareness that makes it possible to reach people who are seldom encountered elsewhere. The events require preparation time and people in attendance (3 or 4 people per show, for 2 to 3 hours).

The forum theatre tool is suitable for when the aim is to create cohesion within a neighbourhood and encourage people to help each other. Participation is lower among people who are not aware of energy saving or who are not part of an existing group.

This is a very enriching experience and allows organisations to approach raising awareness among the general public using innovative tools that should be tried more often. Involving non-professionals in the event is also an area to explore.

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